THE PARENT PERSPECTIVE AND COLLABORATING TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

Elissa Aten, Executive Director & Certified Advocate

Courtney Opdyke, Certified Advocate

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TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

This presentation will provide information and resources for educators to share with families to help ensure student success in developing literacy skills.

"We are stronger as a family now that we have the knowledge about what he needs to thrive." - Parent

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INTRODUCTIONS

Elissa Aten
Founder & Executive Director
Certified Dyslexia Advocate, DTI (2014)
Parent of College Student

Courtney Opdyke
Certified Dyslexia Advocate, DTI (2022)
MIND Youth Program Leader
Parent of College Student & 7th Grader

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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- A SHARED UNDERSTANDING
- THE PARENT PERSPECTIVE
- SCHOOL SUPPORTS
- ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
- Q&A

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A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

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Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

- **Special Education Law**
- **Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)**
- **13 Categories of Coverage:**
  - **Other Health Impairments (OHI): Includes ADHD**
  - **Specific Learning Disability (SLD): Includes Dyslexia**
- **Special Education Services & Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

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Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

- **1 of 13 categories under the IDEA**
- **SLD is defined within the IDEA**
- **Over 40% of students in Utah on an IEP are identified with an SLD**
- **Definition of SLD specifically includes dyslexia**

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Specific Learning Disability (SLD) - Defined

Specific Learning Disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, ***including conditions such*** *as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction,* ***dyslexia****, and developmental aphasia, that affects a student's educational performance.*

Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

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Dyslexia Defined: IDA Definition (2002)

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

International DYSLEXIA Association®

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Dyslexia Defined: UT Definition (2024)

Dyslexia means a **specific learning disorder** that is neurological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities, and typically results from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. **(Utah Code 53E-4-307)**

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IDA Revised Dyslexia Definition (2025, proposed)

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading—affecting accuracy, speed, or both—and/or spelling, that can vary depending on the written language system. These difficulties reflect performance at the low end of a continuum of literacy skill and occur despite evidence-aligned instruction that is effective for the individual's peers. The cause and development of dyslexia involve the interplay of multiple biological and environmental influences. Phonological and/or morphological difficulties are common but not always present. Among the secondary consequences are limitations in language development and academic progress as well as challenges to psychological well-being and vocational opportunities. Although identification and targeted instruction are important at any age, language and literacy support before and during the early years of education can be particularly effective.

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Identification (IDEA) vs. Diagnosis (DSM-5-TR)

- **School evaluations are to identify eligibility under IDEA for SPED services**

- **Private evaluations provide a diagnosis of Specific Learning Disorder**
  - **with impairment in reading (dyslexia)**
  - **with impairment in written expression (dysgraphia)**
  - **with impairment in mathematics (dyscalculia)**

- **Private diagnosis identifies a disorder/disability; however, a student may or may not qualify for SPED services**

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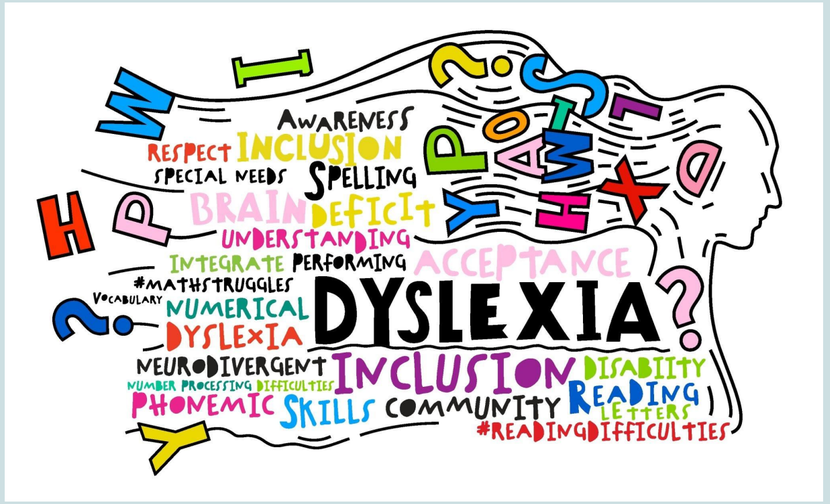
Saying Dyslexia

- Generally, teachers shouldn't say a student is or is not dyslexic, unless formally identified or diagnosed
- If there is a formal identification or diagnosis, this should be included on school documents
- "Characteristics common to dyslexia" may also be included on documents and stated to parents



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Summary

- Dyslexia is included in IDEA's definition of SLD
- Utah law defines dyslexia
- IDA's definition of dyslexia may be changing
- Private evaluations provide a diagnosis of a disorder
- "Dyslexia" can be included in IEPs and 504 Plans

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THE PARENT PERSPECTIVE

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Feelings

- Sadness
- Shame
- Confusion
- Frustration
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Helplessness
- Overwhelmed
- Concerned

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Family History

- Older sibling or parent: risk is 40-60%
- Both parents: risk raises to 75%

Ask an Expert: Nadine Gaab - What does the research say about screening young children for dyslexia?

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Reading is Rocket Science!

- Share information about your reading curriculum
- Tell parents about your training: LETRS
- Explain the term “Structured Literacy”
- Give parents the Reading Rope graphic

Answer these Questions for Parents

- What additional reading support is being given to my child?
- When and how often does this occur?
- Who is providing the additional instruction?
- Where is it taking place?
- How many students are in the group with my child?
- What interventions are being used (curriculum)?
- How do the interventions match classroom instruction?
- Is this support under Tier 2 or Tier 3?
- What is my child missing to receive this support?

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Explain Assessment Tools

- **Differences between Screening, Diagnostic, Progress Monitoring, Outcome Assessments and Benchmarks**
- **Share how and when progress monitoring is done and when parents will receive reports**
- **Acadience: Subtests are important!**
- **End of year testing/Opting out**

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Summary

- Parents are feeling many different emotions
- Share your knowledge with parents about how children learn to read and provide resources
- Answer questions parents should be asking
- Check in with parents frequently and report progress

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SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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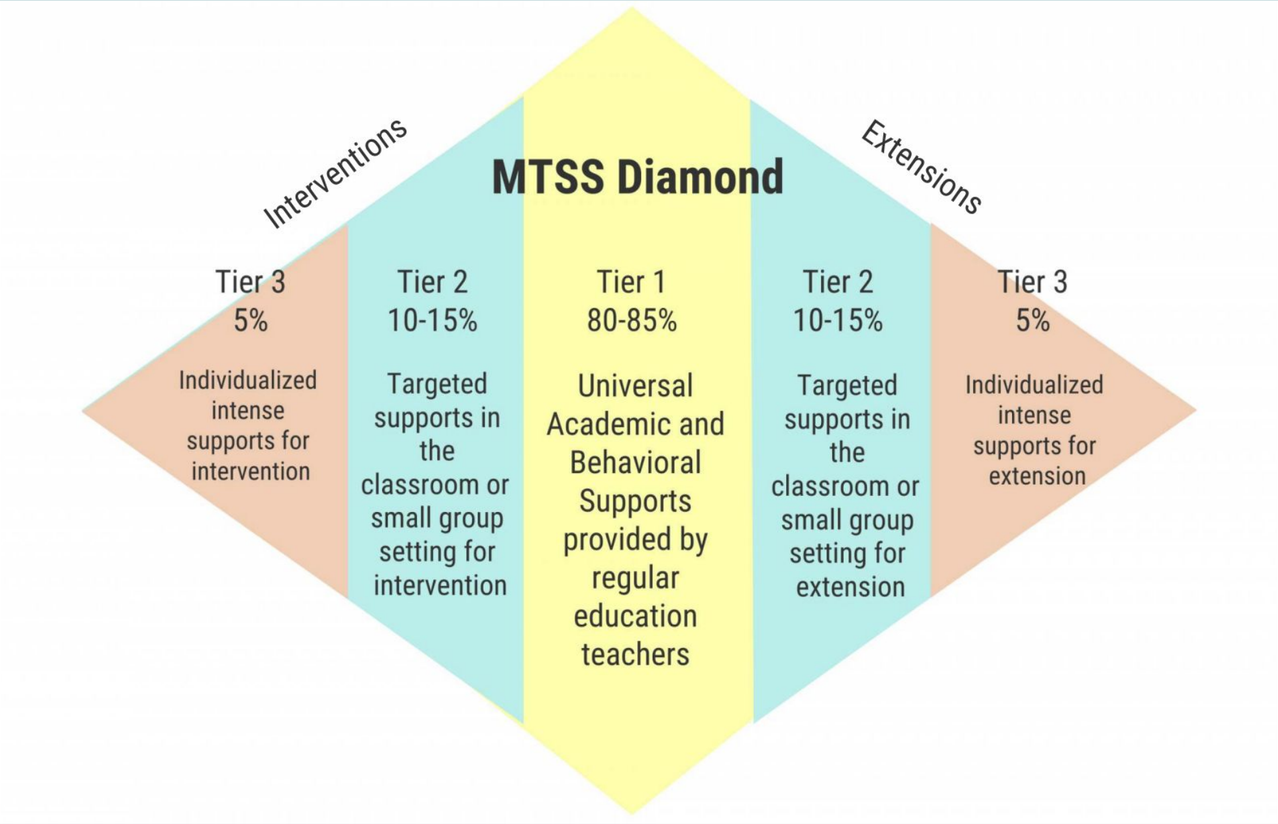
MTSS: Tiers of Support



Park City School District MTSS Handbook, 2024

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Utilize Child Find

- Know the process at your school & use it when appropriate
- Understand the eligibility method used in your school
  - Response to Intervention
  - Combination of RTI and Discrepancy
  - Alternate Research-based method (Patterns of strengths and weaknesses)
- Parents can also request full evaluation

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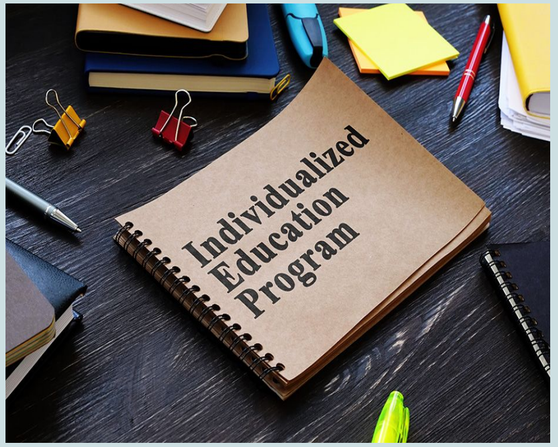
Review IEPs and 504 Plans

- Take time to review these at the beginning of the school year
- Respond to the parents who reach out to you - they are trying to be helpful
- Talk to your students about listed accommodations
- Attend annual meetings & triennial evaluations
- When possible, reach out to your students' past and future teachers



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Understanding Accommodations

- Think about how to implement accommodations in your classroom
- Leave helpful information for substitutes
- Support students in becoming strong self-advocates
- Let parents know what's working/being used
- Make suggestions for additional accommodations

Learning Ally

Bookshare

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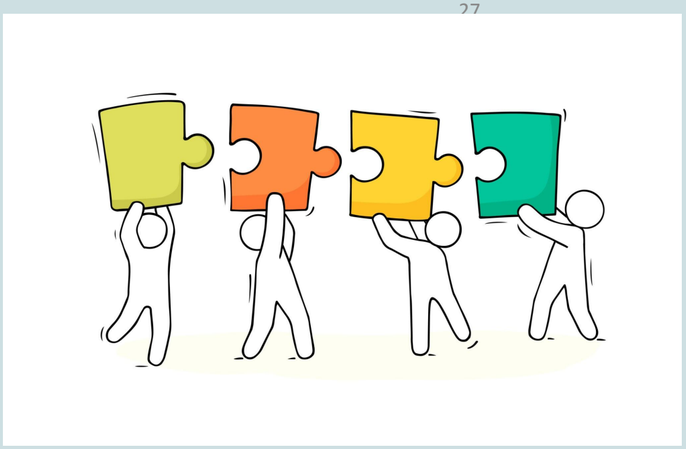
Collaborating with Private Tutors

- **Understand that outside reading tutors are providing valuable instruction rooted in the science of reading**
- **Establish communication with private tutors**
- **Help tutors complement classroom instruction & interventions**



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“You’re not dumb!” - Oakley Robbins

You Won’t Believe What I Said To My Dyslexic Son
Mel Robbins #Shorts
Mel Robbins

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Summary

- Explain the MTSS process in your school
- If you are concerned about a student, utilize Child Find to begin the evaluation process
- Familiarize yourself with IEPs and 504 Plans throughout the year
- Understand and implement required accommodations
- Collaborate with private tutors
- Recognize students' interests & strengths

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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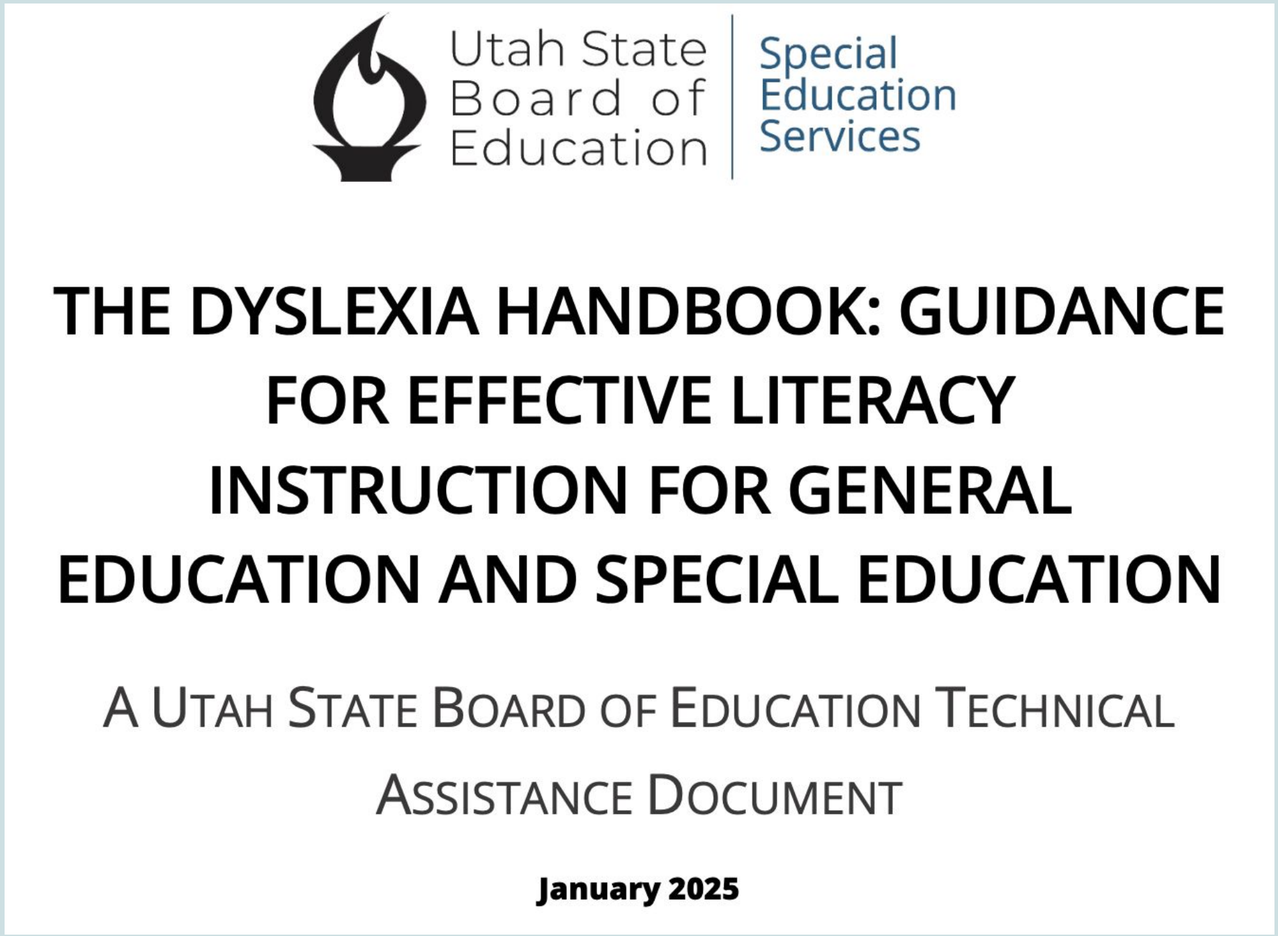

- **First version released in November 2018**
- **Updated version was released in January 2025**

Available online:
https://schools.utah.gov/parent/accommodationsspecialeducation

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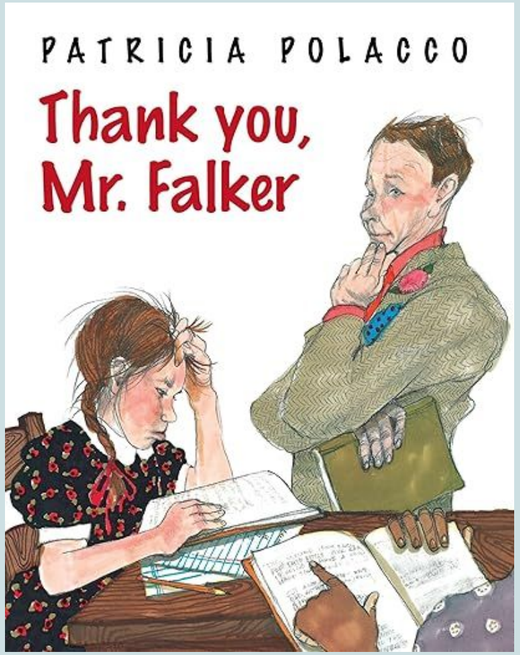
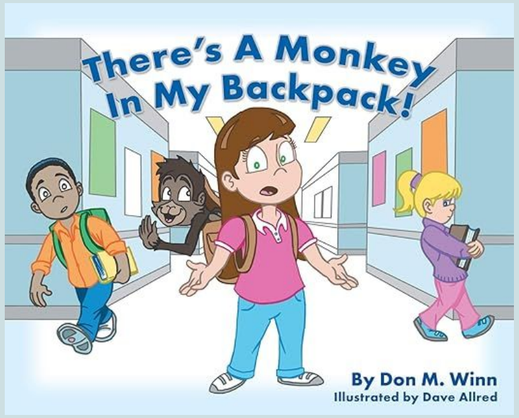
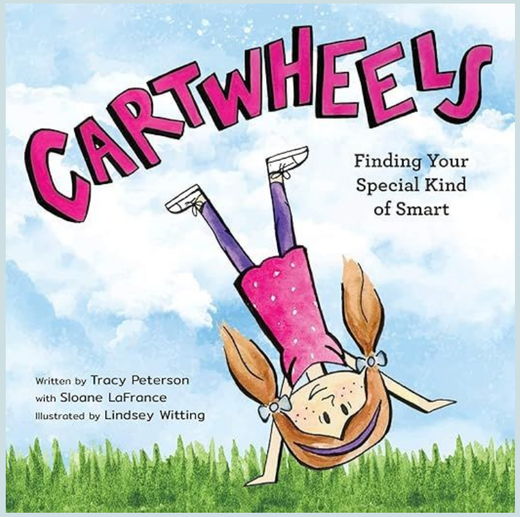
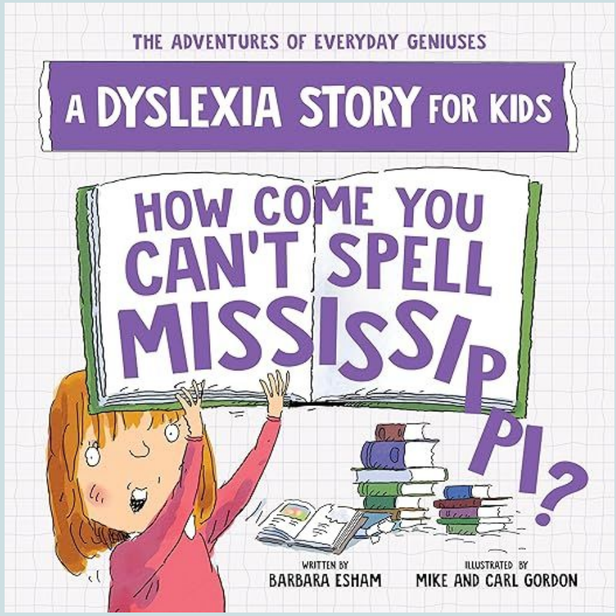
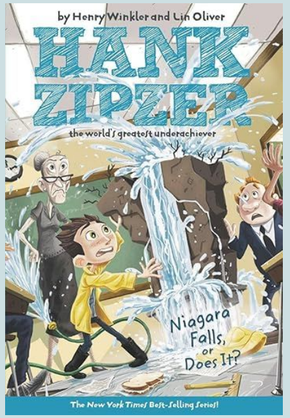
Classroom Favorites

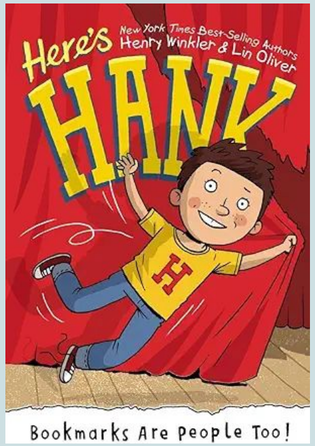












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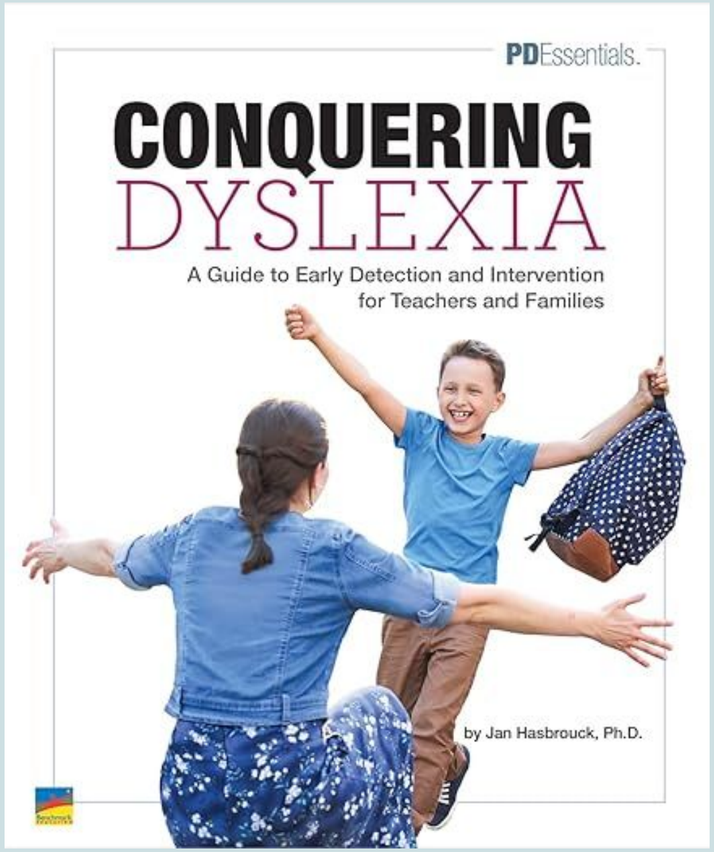
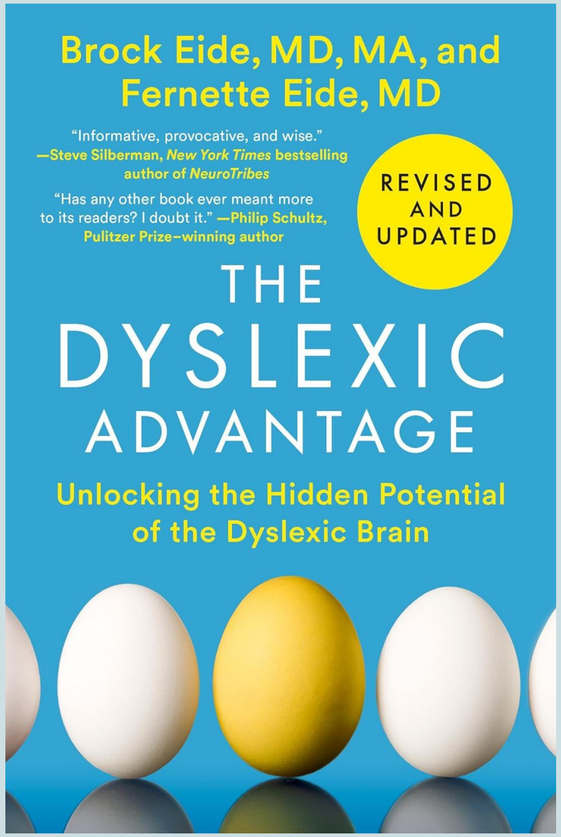
Books for Educators & Parents





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Professional Development Opportunities

- IDA Reading in the Rockies (discounted)
- The Reading League (webinars)
- Glean Education (podcasts & webinars)
- Learning Ally Spotlight on Dyslexia (free option)
- Local education foundations and/or PTOs
- Emily Hanford's Podcasts

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Websites & Social Media

- **PC READS: https://parkcityreads.org/**
- **UT Decoding Dyslexia Chapter: https://www.decodingdyslexiautah.org**
- **The International Dyslexia Association (IDA): https://dyslexiaida.org/**
- **IDA's Dyslexia Digital Library: https://dyslexialibrary.org/**
- **Understood: http://www.understood.org/en**
- **Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity: http://dyslexia.yale.edu**
- **Dyslexia Help (University of Michigan): http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu**

Q&A

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PARK CITY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION